

Three Count.

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Wrestling sizzles, angles fizzle at WCW's Clash of Champions

By ALEX MARVEZ
Three Count Editor

The announcing debut of Jesse Ventura, the turn of three wrestlers and a card interspersed with good and bad wrestling matches highlighted World Championship Wrestling's Clash of Champions special Jan. 21 from Topeka, Kan.

A rundown of the show:

1. Rick-Scott Steiner defeated Mr. Hughes-Big Van Vader when Rick pinned Hughes with a bulldog headlock off the second rope. This match is scheduled around the country in February, so why show Hughes getting pinned in such a convincing fashion? Grade: B or the wrestling itself, F for the stupid booking.

2. Tracey Smothers and Terry Taylor lost to Brian Pillman and Marcus Alexander Bagwell when Bagwell rolled-up Tracey. This match, originally scheduled as a six-man with Tom Zenk and Steve Armstrong added to the appropriate sides, was changed because Steve suffered what was believed to be a serious knee injury one week earlier at a television taping. This was another well wrestled match, and gave Bagwell his first pin on a "major" WCW star. Grade: B+.

A tape of Jushin Liger was then shown, with amazing highlights of his match against Pillman from Dec. 25 at the Omni in Atlanta. WCW's announcing crew said that Liger's opponent for the SuperBrawl pay-per-view was as yet undetermined, which made no sense when Pillman said he was going to face Liger in a later interview.

3. Johnny B. Badd pinned Richard Morton when Badd rolled on top after a cross-body block attempt by Morton. The finish looked real bad. Another booking decision that makes no sense. I know of at least one show (Feb. 7 in Jacksonville) where Badd and Morton are scheduled for a return match after Morton illegally gained a pinfall at the last house show. Fans got to see that match for free, giving them no reason to pay see the same match at the arena. Grade: D.

Then came the worst interview segment of the year so far, with Eric Bischoff, Pillman and Badd. It began on a sour note when Bischoff congratulated Pillman

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on his great win in a six-man tag-team match. Pillman then rambled off on how Liger represents the Japanese industry, which has cost his friends jobs, etc. While this xenophobic non-sense was going on, Badd was posturing, blowing kisses at the camera and planting one of those red kiss stickers on Bischoff's face. After Pillman's interview, Badd planted the same sticker on his face. Pillman, in turn, punched Badd and walked off. Not only does this scenario make no sense, but it is infinitely stupid to try and portray Liger as a heel in this feud. Liger not only doesn't look like a heel, but he doesn't wrestle as one either. Plus, the feud was getting over fine just as a wrestling match between two competitors. Unless WCW is turning Pillman into a xenophobic heel, like Colonel Kirschner was in Portland in 1988, this is probably a Dusty Rhodes idea to make sure neither Pillman or Liger can get over, so the company will be forced to try and drag him out of retirement to save it.

4. P.N. News pinned Diamond Dallas Page with a splash. It wasn't as horrible as I anticipated, as DDP can do a few high spots well. *Three Count* reader John Patton raised a good point when he asked why the music that used to precede News' big splash isn't played in that fashion anymore. Grade: D.

At this point, new WCW executive vice president Kip Frey (or K. Allen Frey as he was announced) made his television debut by introducing Jesse Ventura and announcing Sting vs. Lex Luger as the main event of SuperBrawl II February 29. Luger was not in Topeka live, because his contract does not require him to work any more dates until the pay-per-view show, so he sent in a video taped interview. Yawn.

5. Cactus Jack defeated Van Hammer in a falls-count-anywhere-in-the-building match. This match was full of high spots early, including: Jack attempting to sunset flip Hammer on the concrete floor by jumping off

the second turnbuckle; Hammer powerslamming Jack on the entrance ramp; Jack getting hiptossed from the ramp to the arena floor, followed by a clothesline off the ramp by Hammer. Then, the match was interrupted by a commercial break (which really makes the bout seem important, since I can't remember the last WCW match interrupted by a commercial break). When we returned, Jack and Hammer were fighting outside in the cold near some rodeo grounds, and Missy Hyatt was doing the commentary. As Jack and Hammer brawled through the stables, Abdullah the Butcher popped up wearing a cowboy outfit. Abby hit Cactus and then knocked Hammer out, allowing Jack to gain the pinfall. Abby then attacked Jack, dunking him in a basin of water. Abby also placed Missy in the basin of water, which was an obvious Dusty idea. Grade: B+ for the wild brawl, F for the non-sensical finish.

6. The Freebirds defeated Brad Armstrong and Big Josh when Michael Hayes DDT'd Armstrong. This match was preceded by a four-minute entrance by the 'Birds to their new theme music, with Hayes and Jimmy Garvin lip-synching and walking through the crowd. This was as awful as the Jamison-Bushwhackers stuff at the Royal Rumble. The 'Birds turned heel here, even though no one in the live crowd seemed to notice. However, Jim Ross' overbearing commentary made sure the viewing audience wouldn't forget. Grade: D for the wrestling, F- for the music video.

The streak of horrendous ideas finally ended with the airing of a video tape on the Steiners. This was great, with an announcer giving a somewhat honest biography of the Steiners' career and showing highlights of their victories against The Legion of Doom, The Samoan Swat Team, and Hiroshi Hase and Kensuke Sasaki. The Steiners followed with an interview challenging WCW tag-team champs Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton, which will take place at SuperBrawl.

7. Vinnie Vegas (Kevin Nash a.k.a. Oz) debuted by defeating Thomas Rich. Once again, another example of horrible booking. The Vegas gimmick, as it was explained to me, is supposed to have WCW front-office employee Jody Hamilton play the role of Vinnie's father, a rich Texas oil man. Vinnie is supposed to have screwed up everything in his life, and his dad will disown him if he doesn't succeed as a wrestler. Vinnie would then be advised by Harley Race, who would team Vinnie in matches against the Steiner brothers. None of this was explained on television. Also, this raises the question of why Vinnie would face Rich, who is another heel. Anyway, in this lopsided one minute squash, Vinnie won with what he calls "snake eyes," dropping Rich face first on the turnbuckle. The only redeeming aspect is that Vinnie looks like a taller, more muscular Ted DiBiase, who is a great wrestler. Grade: F.

8. Eaton-Anderson-Larry Zbyszko lost to

Dustin Rhodes-Barry Windham-Ron Simmons when Windham pinned Eaton after punching him with his heavily-taped right hand. This was a great match, with Windham looking good even if it was his first match back after almost a three-month hiatus. Tony Schiavone interviewed Windham in the locker room afterward, with BW vowing revenge on the Dangerous Alliance while Rhodes and Simmons looked intense. Good stuff. Grade: B.

9. Sting and Ricky Steamboat defeated Rick Rude and Steve Austin in Ventura's first call of a WCW match. This was Austin's first match in more than two weeks since blowing out his knee at a house show, and he wasn't anywhere near full speed. To me, Ventura came across too heavily as a heel, which isn't what WCW needs if it is to successfully promote the style of wrestling they are trying to. I understand the finish was originally supposed to be Steamboat pinning Rude, helping to set up their match at SuperBrawl. Instead, Steamboat pinned Austin after a cross-body block off the top rope. Sting also covered Steamboat, making the babies look like they were winning 2-on-1. After the match, Rude got Paul E. Dangerously's belt and began whipping Steamboat as the WCW ring crew attempted to pull the Alliance away. Grade: B-

Notes: As you can probably tell, I really disliked this Clash (as documented in my Jan. 26 wrestling column for *The Miami Herald*). The main reason for my feelings does not have to do with the show's work rate, but with what the Clash should be. WCW will never have a better time to try and sell its product, either live or on pay-per-view, then a two-and-a-half hour special featuring all its top stars. But this show didn't lead anywhere. The pre-Clash hype was awful, also. Why not shoot a teaser with Ventura, luring WCW fans who watch the Saturday shows to tune in on Jan. 21? It might have helped, seeing the show did a dismal 3.7 television rating — one of the worst ever for a Clash.

Late breaking news...

Hulk Hogan will wrestle Sid Justice in the main event of Wrestlemania VIII April 5, with Ric Flair defending the WCW title against Randy Savage on the same show. The scenario will unfold on this weekend's television shows, as Hogan will be announced as Flair's top contender for a match at Wrestlemania. But when Justice walks out on Hogan in a tag-team match against Flair and The Undertaker on the WWF's FOX Network special Feb. 8 (9 p.m. telecast E.S.T.) Hogan will forgo the title match to face Justice. Savage, who will likely defeat rival Jake Roberts in convincing fashion on the FOX special, will then be named Flair's top contender. Justice will also be managed by long-time friend Harvey Whippleman, a.k.a. Downtown Bruno from the Memphis territory. More details in next week's issue.

Clash crashes as lack of depth shines through

By PAUL HANLIN JR.
Three Count Columnist

World Championship Wrestling, 1992 and the United States space program, circa late 1950s. What do they have in common?

As I watched the most recent Clash of the Champions, my mind flashed back to the days of our space program when the unmanned rocket on the pad at Cape

Paul Hanlin Jr. ... View from the Northeastern Lights

Kennedy launched majestically, only to suddenly come back down and blow up. It happened fairly often before we finally got it right, and it lasted only a few seconds.

What occurred on January 21 took only slightly longer, say two hours and 35 minutes ...

Quite a letdown, folks. As WCW presented its first prime-time special of 1992, let's say up front what *wasn't* the problem.

It wasn't the site for the show. Topeka, Kan., is finally somewhere other than Georgia. It wasn't two hot opening matches and two hot closing matches. It wasn't that there were zero, repeat, zero run-ins. This on a card courtesy of Virgil R. Runnels (call Mr. Ripley, because this one belongs in "Believe it or not."). It wasn't Missy Hyatt taking the Nestea plunge. It wasn't Cactus Jack or Van Hammer or Abdullah the Butcher, who looked like he was auditioning for a part in the sequel to *City Slickers*, shovel and all. And it surely wasn't the debut of Jesse Ventura (more on him later).

Then what did the Clash in?

Too many matches ... again. Almost every face got his hand raised. A time beginning from the third match until the end of the seventh that sucked the heat from a viewing standpoint so much that it made last November's Survivor Series look like *Wrestle War '89*. The way-too-long bit with The Freebirds (Mr. Frey, there's a phrase for this kind of thing. It's called *beating a dead horse*). A card that did not have a key player in the Ricky Steamboat-Rick Rude feud at ringside (Madusa). And most of all, it's the one thing WCW is lacking right now, which, as anyone who endured the Clash from 8:30 to 10 p.m., will attest to. It's a five-letter word that crystallizes how far WCW has come — and how far it has to go.

Depth.

WCW has great workers (almost all of the Dangerous Alliance, Terry Taylor, Ricky Steamboat, Dustin Rhodes, Brian Pillman, Cactus Jack, Barry Windham and Jushin Liger), but its depth plummets after that. Richard Morton, Larry Zbyszko, Thomas Rich, Van Hammer, Big Josh, Tracey Smothers, The Freebirds, P.N. News, Kevin "Master Blaster, Oz, Vinnie Vegas" Nash — these are not the kind of guys you trot out on a prime-time special, especially when there are serious doubts about the future of Hulk Hogan and the WWF once everyone in the media does a Phil Mushnick and pounces on the steroid scandal. That stretch of the show ruined the final two matches, which would have been four stars each had there been a solid mid-card.

It started hot with the two tag-team matches (Rick-Scott Steiner vs. Big Van Vader-Mr. Hughes; Taylor-Smothers vs. Pillman-Marcus Alexander Bagwell), and I thought we were finally going to get a Clash to remember for its good stuff. Then came the third match. And the fourth. And the fifth, sixth and seventh. The two highlights in that stretch were Cactus vs. Hammer and the new spot for Butterfingers candy bars with Bart Simpson in the karate school. That is a future classic.

Jesse The Body still had the edge that made him so memorable when he was with the Fed. I think Ventura lit a fire under Jim Ross' backside last Tuesday. The result was the best call of a match I've heard since the Ric Flair-Terry Funk I Quit showcase more than two years ago on TBS. That was one of the very few highlights on an otherwise disappointing evening.

So what to do about the depth problem? You go to your partners, in this case New Japan Pro Wrestling. But not since the days of Pearl Harbor has anti-Japanese sentiment been so pervasive in this land. The rather pointed remarks from Japanese officials that 30 percent of the U.S. car-making work force performs poorly will not go over *at all* with people used to Japanese villains for 45-plus years. Will the WCW-NJPW relationship survive, or will WCW rely on good old-fashioned xenophobia?

Something to ponder for next time? You bet.

As for the Royal Rumble, score one for the Whiff, as that pay-per-view show continues to get praise from the hard-core fans. Flair going 60 minutes to the second in winning the WWF strap? A WWF match between four and five stars?

Take me now, Lord, I've heard it all...

Sunshine State News

PWF: The first-ever Japanese-American shoot fighting card in the United States has been confirmed, as Pro Wrestling Fujiwara will run an eight-match show March 20 at the James L. Knight Center in Miami. Headlining will be **Bart Vail** (the PWF star and South Florida karate instructor who is responsible for promoting the show) against **Yoshiaki Fujiwara** for the group's heavy-weight championship. The undercard has **Ken Shamrock** (Vince Torrelli) vs. **Masaharu Funaki**, **Minoru Suzuki** vs. **Mac Roesch** and **Yusuke Fukai** vs. **Jerry Flynn**. **Kazao Takahashi** will also be wrestling, and three amateur matches will be held with some of Vail's students. Tickets are \$15.75 ringside, \$13.50 reserved ringside and \$10.50 general admission (imagine if they charged similar prices in Tokyo for one of these shows. There would probably be a riot at the ticket lines, as ringside prices vary between \$80-\$150 in Japan).

On the show, they will have the contract signing for former boxing champion **Roberto Duran**, who will face Funaki in April in Tokyo. The PWF wanted Duran, 40, to fight on the Miami show, but for income tax reasons, he wouldn't (Duran had major problems with the Internal Revenue Service a few years back that forced him to extend his boxing career about five years beyond what it should have been). Duran's last fight was last March against "Irish" **Pat Lawler** on the undercard of the first **Mike Tyson-Razor Ruddock** match. Duran lost via forfeit when he broke his hand, and was obviously old and out of shape. He was reported at weighing 200 pounds about three weeks before the fight, and dropping more than 40 pounds during that time to make the weight limit of his division.

I will be driving from Gainesville for this show, and will give a report in *Three Count*. Also, Vail has opened the first shoot fighting school in North America in Miami. Call 305-266-1601 for more information. For those of you who aren't familiar with the "shoot fighting" phrase, it is a combination of amateur wrestling, kick boxing and submission holds, like arm bars and sleeper holds, rolled into one. It does not offer very many similarities to pro wrestling, and looks more like kick boxing. The style can be arduous, but also highly entertaining when executed properly.

Suncoast: The big news from this Bradenton-based group is a claim by **Bobby Rodgers** that "Nature Boy" **Buddy Rodgers** will be appearing on the group's next show April 11, which will be a television taping at the Manatee County Civic Center. Bobby Rodgers broke into wrestling billed as the grandson of Buddy, which was an inside joke on Bobby. On a radio show last August, Buddy denounced any affiliation with Bobby, but who knows.

Two title changes took place on the Jan. 24 show in Manatee in front of an estimated crowd of 200. The results saw **Jim Cooper** and **Kino McKenzie** fight to a no-finish when Cooper covered referee **Frankie Reyes** and McKenzie counted the pinfall (Cooper does a **George Steele** idiot gimmick; finish got over pretty well); **Bobby Rodgers** defeated **Iron Wolf** to capture some kind of light heavyweight title with a figure-four leg lock (Rodgers looked good); **Bobby Blaze** pinned Suncoast owner **Henry Raines** after Blaze turned on Hammerin' Henry in what started as a scientific match. Raines was small packaged after getting eye raked on a break on the ropes. Raines said Blaze would be booked on the next Suncoast show, anyway; **Penelope Paradise** defeated **Allison Royal** after reversing a flying body press; **Ion Weston** lost to **Rick Ryder** when Ryder reversed a small package; In a mask vs. mask match (way to win the match is by removing an opponent's hood), **The Giant Outlaw** defeated **Poison Ivy**. The finish to this was all screwed up, as Ivy was wearing a second mask underneath. Outlaw began posturing to the crowd unaware of that, and was supposed to get hit in the back with Ivy's briefcase. However, the briefcase broke open and Ivy had to pick up his belongings; **Rico Federico** captured the Florida title from **Jumbo Baretta**. Finish came when Penelope climbed up on the ring apron, distracting Baretta. Rico then caught Baretta with a roll-up from behind for the pin; "Big V" **Vern Henderson** and **Gator Gilmore** went to a 20-minute draw with **Jerry Flynn** and **Fire Cat** (**Brady Boone**) in the best match on the show. The match was worked like the **Lex Luger-Sting** vs. **Rick-Scott Steiner** from last year's **SuperBrawl** pay-per-view, with both teams selling to let their opponents shine. Raines is hoping to have a rematch on his next TV taping with a more conclusive finish; the last match saw **Dean Malenko** win the Suncoast Southern title from **The Masked Superstar** (**Bob Cook**). Federico, who was at ringside, threw in the title belt to Superstar after a referee bump. Superstar knocked Malenko out with it, but there was no referee to count the pinfall. Malenko eventually revived as Superstar was distracted at ringside by Baretta, hit Superstar with the belt, tossed it to Baretta and got the pinfall. It was the typical solid match between the two.

Ryder promoted an independent show on Jan. 25 in Venice in front of an estimated crowd of 400-450 (Ryder promotes shows in the city about every six months). In the main event, **Blackjack Mulligan** and **Ryder** defeated **Cook** and **Robbie Idol** in a wild brawl all over the Venice Community Center.

ICWA: Big news has the group beginning March 7 with its first television slot on WTTA (Ch. 38) in Tampa
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Spotlight on: Terry Funk

Terry Funk has been celebrated in wrestling circles for years. It's just now that an entirely new audience gets to discover Funk's antics on a regular basis. Funk, the former National Wrestling Alliance champion, has just begun a regular role on the CBS show Tequilla and Bonetti (Saturdays, 9 p.m.). Funk may be branching into a more mainstream area with acting, but his exploits in that field are also well documented. He had a role in the 1977 Sylvester Stallone movie Paradise Alley, and appeared in Stallone's Over the Top as well. Funk was also a regular on the short-lived ABC series Wildside. Funk, who is in a state of semi-retirement, pays extreme attention to today's wrestling scene, and recent allegations of wide spread anabolic steroid use in the sport have given Funk the desire to speak out on the subject. The following interview serves as a platform for Funk's views and his feelings on the coverage Wrestling Observer Newsletter editor Dave Meltzer, New York Post columnist Phil Mushnick and myself have devoted to steroids.

AM: Could you please discuss your feelings on the media's slow reaction to Phil Mushnick's New York Post article on Hulk Hogan and steroids? I thought a larger media blitz was in the future.

TF: I don't think the media is going to slow down. In fact, I think it's going to pick up. I think steroids are an important issue. I just wonder if people like you and press from things like 20/20 and every other periodical will eventually say "Oh, there's steroid use in wrestling? We already know that. It's old hat."

I always try to clarify myself on this subject. I'm not just sitting here waving a red flag at wrestling saying steroid abuse in wrestling makes it the most atrocious sport in the world. It's something that is very predominant in all sports. I try to make that clear first, and then I talk about my sport. Steroid abuse is running rampant throughout the country at this time. I think it should be faced and dealt with, and hopefully, there can be some way it could be controlled. I don't know if this is the way. It is going to take a very smart individual with a plan to devise a way that might possibly educate our country or eliminate steroids from our sporting society. It's very hard to do that with the money people are making off steroid use.

People begin to tire whenever you write about something so much. It is just looked at and nothing is done. I don't know if you or Dave (Meltzer, Wrestling Observer Newsletter publisher) is going to grow tired. Dave jumped into this thing so hard and openly and so full-heartedly that he is probably one of the foremost authorities on steroids in sports today. That's because he sees it as a problem. That's meant as a compliment. If I wanted to know something about steroids, I'd ask Dave.

AM: When did you start seeing steroid abuse as a problem in wrestling?

TF: I never did for a long time. I never thought it was a good thing, but as a professional, I never saw it as a true problem. But then I saw a young kid with a real life-threatening problem like death caused from steroids, like Rick McGraw (a former WWF preliminary wrestler who died of a heart attack in 1985 at 28 years of age). Even though you can't totally attribute his death to

steroids, I always felt it helped cause it. He was a hell of a guy, and I liked his personality. I always liked how hard he tried. Possibly he tried too hard, because I don't think he would be able to compete without steroids.

AM: Did that open your eyes?

TF: Sort of. Then I became aware of how openly steroids were being used in all sports. That also opened my eyes. To be perfectly honest about my experience with them, I took three shots of steroids when I had my broken back in Atlanta in 1988. They told me it was very good at healing, which it was. I never took another one, just because it caused me shortness of breath. That's why I took them. I know that sounds like a Hulk Hogan excuse, but I'm being honest with you.

AM: I guess the answer to this question is fairly obvious, but how do you feel steroids have changed the business?

TF: It has changed the look of wrestling into mostly the way you look. I would say I don't think steroids have changed wrestling. I think people with the power — the promoters — have changed the look of wrestling. They are the ones that are the guilty parties. Not the guys. Its who uses the guys that determines what guys do.

AM: You don't have to mention names, but what can you say about steroid use among WCW wrestlers during your 1988-89 tenure?

TF: You had certain groups that hang together. You've got the beer drinkers, etc. If you're not a user, which I wasn't, you don't see it. You know it's there, but it's a very underlying thing. People are not very open about it. They know they're using it, and I know they are. It's underlying. I know it's being done, but nobody ever says it. It's like if you had drug abusers. There are a bunch of guys using steroids, and they don't go around with the guys who aren't using them. It goes in cliques — those that choose steroids and those that don't. And there weren't very many that didn't.

Old Norman (the Lunatic, a.k.a. Mike "Muchan Singh" Shaw) and I would ride down the road together. He was my buddy. I guess me and him and Dick Murdoch were the other group. It was a very different world,

especially when you drive down the road with Dick. He would be playing that country and western music, and if you touched the radio channel, he would scream like hell. Reba McIntire would come on, and he'd say they were close, even though he never met her. I wouldn't be with the other group, but they were good guys. And I'm not saying that anyone I didn't travel with was a steroid user.

If I came into a situation where someone would ask who my favorite wrestler today was, I'd say I like them all. I really mean that. I like all the guys, because it's something I feel for them. It's a strange thing. It's strange the love you feel. Anyone who competes in sports and loves the game they play would pay any price to play it. If I was 20 years old, as much as I love pro wrestling — and believe me, I love it — if I had to pay that kind of price, I probably would pay it. If that's the only way you will be able to play, you will pay the price for it. It's a sad thing, but it's true. The price or using steroids is very severe health problems in the future. That's why you have to have some type of control on sports. I can't blame the wrestlers, but I do hold some people responsible for a lot of young people being in tough situations.

If a young guy wants to play, they figure it out. "Look at him," they say. "I know what he's doing, because I read it in a magazine. I know what that guy is on." And they educate themselves, because they want to play the game. You have to have some sort of controlling factor. That's not much in the pro wrestling world, as you only have two promoters to control. In other sports, it is.

AM: Are people becoming aware of what you are saying?

TF: That is questionable. The other day I saw some Chippendale dancers on a TV talk show. One of the audience members asked how many hours does that man work out in a day. The guy will say he works out six hours a day, and the public believes it. I'm sure some of them probably do. But in most cases, that type of body is not secured without an additive. And that additive is steroids. What you are talking about and trying to write about is going to a very uneducated public on the subject.

AM: How do you educate the public?

TF: That is a difficult problem. It's very difficult to educate people that you can't look like that without an additive.

AM: Bob Roop once told me a wrestling promoter would sell tickets to a match if he knew one guy's heart was going to explode as long as he made money. Is this a fair philosophy?

TF: That would hold true for some of them. But, remember, too, there were the Paul Bosch's and Sam Muchnick's of the world, too.

AM: What is your solution to wrestling's steroid problem?

TF: First, the fans have to be educated to what's going on. That would be very difficult. My total solution would be to have separate state control. That's the only feasible way to do it dollar-and-cent wise, because otherwise it can't be done because it's too expensive. I've made the statement before several times. You need honest people to run it, but where are you going to find them? I'm not sure we can find 50 honest people in the whole country who wouldn't succumb to payoffs. I'm being fecicious, but you need to get a state control with the goodness of sports.

If a state agency was in control, it would have the right to test at any time in all sports. For example, if you have the New York Giants going into Florida to play Tampa Bay or Miami, and all of a sudden, one of the Giants key players can't play for that reason, it wouldn't take too long to say, "Hey guys, let's cut this shit out because it's costing us games." It also costs prestige, money at the box office and is going to cost us the championship if it continues. The same thing holds true with (WWF owner) Vince McMahon or with WCW. If a superstar comes to Florida and fails, and then fails tests in 10-12 other markets, what is a promoter going to do? Clean up.

AM: Some have suggested McMahon could merely gather his wrestlers in one room, turn his back, say he wanted everyone who was on steroids to get off and promise no decrease in push to smaller wrestlers, and the steroid problem would be solved. It's not that simple, is it?

TF: I don't think it is. We have both heard of rebellious people who have already said, "The hell with you, Vince. We want to take steroids." It's a competitive world, and maybe Vince feels he can't let all those wrestlers who won't get off go because someone else will take them then.

AM: What's it going to take for McMahon to stop?

TF: I think if he sees steroid use as a threat to his financial structure that he will clean it up. That will happen if you educate people as to what is going on, like smoking in airports. It's very difficult, because you don't have a whole lot of people into this thing. There's you, Meltzer and guys who jump on the bandwagon, like the reporters from 20/20. As long as you guys go ahead and get some momentum rolling and people don't get tired of it, there's a chance. You should be looking at this as a street fight. It's going to last a long, long time, and the odds aren't in your favor. You had better be ready to duck and dodge bullets that come your way.

AM: Earlier on, you said you love the wrestlers in the business today. How can you keep that attitude when some wrestlers in WCW refused to "work" matches with you that were beneficial to your's and the company's drawing power?

TF: I still love them because we're down to two organizations. I have no degree of respect for some. But I have a lot of respect for a lot of guys in the business. For many, they physically bust their butts, go up and down the road, and pay one hell of a price. But I cannot say much for Hulk Hogan. I've lost all respect for him in recent months. I have very little respect for Vince McMahon. I still like to think of myself as an athlete. I say it with pride. I say Vince and Hogan are a couple of assholes for proclaiming wrestling as "sports entertainment" and bringing the sport to the way it is now, with entertainment like snake bites, body bags and the Persian Gulf war.

AM: But if it weren't for McMahon, most wrestling journalists today wouldn't be around. How would you deal with someone like me if I was around in the 1970s?

TF: I definitely wouldn't speak to you. It would make you respect me more. And I'd respect you for digging around for stories. That would make it fun. You don't even have to dig for news stories today. It's really atrocious. What I'm talking about now I would talk about in the 1960s. But I think you guys see the future of the business and what it could be.

AM: Could you talk a little bit about the current success of your current/former employer, All Japan Pro Wrestling, and the booming success they are currently having with a hard technical wrestling style and realistic storylines?

TF: They show how you should do business. That's how you draw money, because that's what people want to see. What was the last match the American public was interested in?

AM: Probably Andre the Giant vs. Hogan?

TF: Exactly. What's wrong is you don't have confrontations like that anymore. Nowadays, you have things like whose in whose hot tub or some ridiculous other shit. What does anything have to do with snake bites or horseshit with crosses? It's absurd shit. (The WWF) thinks its doing business today. They're not. They were when they were drawing 100,000 fans to the Silverdome. God only knows how much money they made off that show. But they got away from what got them there. They got too smart for that, because they became what they proclaimed they were — entertainment. Don't misunderstand me, though. I'm not against the guys who are competing there. I'm against who they are forced to work for. A lot of guys don't really like it.

AM: How does your brother, Dory, like wrestling for All Japan?

TF: He enjoys it. He always told me he would wrestle until he couldn't wrestle any more, and then he would referee until he couldn't walk anymore. He loves the business. Sure he likes it.

AM: What are your thoughts on the resignation

of Jim Herd as executive vice president of WCW?

TF: I don't think Jim Herd was totally at fault. To be very honest, I don't think Herd had the knowledge to run the company. I think people got his ear, and were a bit vicious.

AM: How are you enjoying full-time acting?

TF: I'm enjoying it. I think it can become a big-time thing, but I'm not sure I want it to. I love it, and will continue to do what I am doing. But it's very time consuming and there are very crowded expressways. There are many idiots in California. I would like to have a little more fresh air, like out on the Double Cross (ranch). But it's very good money and I enjoy it very much. I just don't believe I'm a California man. I can't get used to a lot of things here, and neither can my wife.

AM: So is there any chance of a return to the ring?

TF: Hell, I'm an old fart. I certainly wish I wasn't. But being an old fart is sometimes very hard to admit. I don't want to sound bitter. I am not bitter about guys making tremendous money. I think it's wonderful and most are deserving. They certainly aren't making baseball player-type money, but they're not doing bad. Certainly, they're doing better than I ever have. And I think that's terrific. I am for the guys. I am for them all. Whatever people say what they say about steroids, I'm still for them. I think health-wise they are not good for them. Whenever I make statements like the ones I have, I mean them for them. Everyone has a love of the business, because there is a hell of a price to pay to be in it. And they would like it to be another way.

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Next issue: There's some news brewing from both the WCW and WWF offices that I didn't have complete confirmation of at press time, so it will have to wait until next time. Also coming up is another interview with a yet-to-be-determined participant, Paul Hanlin Jr.'s column on xenophobia with Japanese wrestling, a report on Eddy Mansfield's scheduled Feb. 1 television taping in Orlando, the return of "scoop sheet" and match results and much more. See ya soon!

Sunshine State News

(Continued on Page 8)

at 10 a.m. The group is going to tape TV shows weekly at WVEU, which is the studio where Mike Graham and Steve Keirn taped their episodes of Professional Wrestling from Florida in 1990... The group once again had a major success in Hudson, with a turnaway crowd of 1,000 Jan. 25 for a guaranteed show featuring Junkyard Dog and Kendall Windham. The main event saw Dean Malenko lose to Jimmy Backlund when Pat Tanaka interfered.

Notes: The Committee on Regulated Industry meeting concerning the regulation of pro wrestling in the state was postponed until the week of Feb. 4, because of the absence of legislative analyst Janet Clark for personal reasons. I will have more information on the hearing's date next issue.

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